AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL APPROACH TO THE CREATIVE PROCESS AND TO MY CREATIVE WORK

by

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INTRODUCTION

We who paint turn with reluctance to writing. We would much prefer to present our work and be silent until those happy occasions when the exuberance of wine and good fellowship encourage discussion. But since my work must now be explained, attacked, defended, and discussed, I shall try to do it in terms of my own life.

I am interested in all theories of art. I have no very definite one of my own, nor should have for many years to come. It isn't proper at my age! And I am not willing to restrict my concentration to one facet of my interests. It is against the grain of my personality, for better or for worse, to do so, and that personality has produced the painting to be discussed. So in the course of this paper I shall reveal various facets of myself, my thinking, my feeling, and try to relate these discovered things to the drive toward creativity and to the work which I have done. In the first part of the paper a fairly large number of these aspects will be mentioned and several of these, in the second part, will be expanded.

I consider that my paintings form the main part of my thesis and that this paper functions as a commentary on their formation. This is not a scholarly paper but an introspective one, and for that reason, I believe, it will be of more value to me as part of a self-educational process. It is hard to imagine that a student paper of any kind, scholarly or otherwise, can be of much value to anyone but the author.

CHAPTER I

SELECTIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

If we keep a sense of wonder, do not become blasé, blunt our sensitivity as little as the world will let us, everything that our senses perceive can have its effect on the formation of what we become. What I have so far become has produced my paintings, and of the many things which have made me, I can discuss but a few. Those things ordinarily discussed in a biography - family, friends, education, travel, occupations, present a large part of the environment in which we are formed. The problem is to discuss them pertinently so that we may come close to the truth. I hope that all of the autobiographical material which I shall present in this chapter can throw some light on the answer to the question "How come the creative artist?"

Both art and philosophical thinking are in my family background. My father is a minister and a teacher of religious education. My maternal grandfather was the sculptor Lorado Taft. Perhaps the very fact of my closeness to art and philosophy produced the effect that I took neither of them very seriously for many years. My father is a very liberal man in his theology and is repelled by the mockeries which men of little understanding have made of the words of the prophets. Early in my life I heard critical discussions of various members of the clergy and of their approach to religion. My father is not an authoritarian and his own convictions are on a level too

mature for a child to grasp. So I became instilled with the critical attitude only. I somehow came to feel that my family was above religion, that we made our living at it but did not need to take it seriously. (I believe that a somewhat similar early attitude was formed by my mother about art.)

This concept was of course modified and rethought through several phases of adolescence, but it left me with a permanent and strong tendency to question and examine all theories, to hate dogma, and to enjoy paradox. These attitudes have strongly affected the course of the wavering path I have taken in my search for a creativity and expression of my own. Their goading influence has perhaps helped to keep me on this path but it has also made the path more thorny. Their appearance has made at least one teacher feel that I have a resistance to teaching, but since I often later accept or partly accept ideas which I have at first attacked, I feel that this process which has the objectionable appearance of resistance is really more nearly like that of digestion. The initial attack could be likened to mastication.

My questioning of theories, my hate of dogma and my enjoyment of paradox, which came out of this early family situation, have also affected my paintings a good deal and I think often to their detriment as works of art. They are evidenced in the paintings by a certain lack of authority and a tentativeness in the setting down of the forms. The part they play in the paintings as student work though, I think is valuable. A lack of strong conviction and a confusion in mind and intention is bound to create a confusion in the

hand. But it is better to have strong convictions at forty or fifty than at twenty-six.

Regardless of the later value of my family background, my first real interests in the serious study of philosophy and art were stimulated, during middle and late adolescence, by outside people. I was introduced to painting by an abstract artist whom I met during my senior year of college. When I came in contact with this painter I had no knowledge of the historical development of modern art, and I attacked the theories he presented with all the questions I could think of. He was patient; he answered my questions, told me what books would answer more of them, and at the end of the term he wrote on my report card the one word "Aware."

I had begun to learn about painting because I wanted to and because I felt it was my business to. I have in my life approached five or six subjects for these same reasons: philosophy and literature at Guilford College, theater, literature, anthropology, and painting at Rollins College, and literature and painting here at Woman's College. These subjects have all helped to mature me by developing in me a relatively calm, philosophical, and realistic concept of the historical continuity of the world and of my own place in it. They have thus contributed both toward my drive to be creative and to the quality of my work.

I believe that from early childhood I have had an abnormally strong interest in abstract thought and personal relationships and a correspondingly abnormal disinterest in things. To be oblivious to things is deadly for a painter. I had no interest in pictures before

I found abstract art but abstract painting itself began to stimulate my interest in the modern world about me. I began to listen to Jazz, which I had formerly scorned. I began to notice architecture and construction and the texture of things. I became visual-minded to a much greater degree, and in short, I discovered a new world.

I should like to introduce now, in this autobiographical section, one concept of the creative drive, so that I may give a brief account of my life in terms of the various dissatisfactions which have been forceful in the formation of this drive as it is related to this particular concept, which I shall call "the desire to be God."

I do not think about God much any more. At various times in my life I have had absorbing interests in both God and flying saucers. But since it appears that there is little chance of finding out anything concrete about either at this time, I simply do not think about them much. Anyway there is that concept of a creative and organizing force in the universe. It takes a newborn child almost no time to realize that things are not created and organized wholly to his satisfaction. Later he finds that neither are they created for the "greatest good of the greatest number of people." He begins to feel that if he could do some of this creating and organizing himself, there would be some improvement. In a family in which a certain amount of democratic freedom is allowed, this desire on the part of the child to do the organizing is frustrated only to a practical degree and not sufficiently to kill the conscious desire. Still the child is frustrated, he does not become God, and if he can philosophically accept the fact that he will not become God, he matures,

becomes a good citizen, takes an interest in politics and civic affairs, goes to the polls, and does his infinitesimally small, but, as he knows, important and constructive bit toward the shaping of the world. But isn't that a pale substitute for being God! The creative arts are better, more concrete, certainly.

Those very earliest dissatisfactions I have largely forgotten but I now have three children of my own in whom I see them reflected. I suppose there is always a degree of rebellion against order imposed from without.

I attended two years of kindergarten, and there I was given a large degree of freedom in which to create my own situation in make-believe games. In that kind of an atmosphere I was able to learn a good deal about a variety of things including human relationships. But I hated public school from the first grade through the twelfth. There was no chance there to create my own situation, and a great deal of the material presented seemed to have no relation to it. I should like to have been Lord God of the Public School. At that time I probably should have abolished it!

When I grew to be aware of society, politics, the world situation and the various ideologies, I perceived that a Savior, a New Creator and Arranger was needed. I should like to have been that Savior. So far I have not been offered an opportunity to be so.

After high school I was inducted into the abomination of the army. With all its pain, the army is in a sense restful. That is, it is like being in jail. There is a suspension of any feelings of responsibility toward the maturing, forming, and creating of one's own life. A carry-over of this attitude into civilian life can help to

make one more comfortable, but it is not likely to prod one to great achievement.

During my life as a student and between the times of being a student, I have worked at various jobs. I have been a camp counselor, a manual laborer, a salesman of various products, an actor, a messenger, a night-watchman, a mill worker and a teacher. I have observed that most of the occupations of men can become as impertinent and meaningless toward the forming of a creative and mature life as seemed the study of much of the material in high school. One gets the feeling that he is at best perhaps vaguely benefitting society and at worst earning a living. What among the occupations of man is less silly than painting! Maybe a few but not many. Education and political leadership are two fields which at their best can be as creative as the more concrete arts.

That very important aspect of sex, in which both satisfaction and dissatisfaction play forceful roles in their bearing upon the creative drive, will be approached in the next chapter.

So during my life I formed these various dissatisfactions with an ill-made world, which I could control and recreate only to an exceedingly small degree. In painting, however, there is given to me a small world in which I can achieve the agonizing and tremendously exhilarating role of Creator.

I have also found many pleasures and satisfactions in life. They are perhaps as important to the desire for creativity as the dissatisfactions. They also provide material. I have always been deeply affected by the beauties of nature and have spent summers hiking in the Great Smokies. When I was alone with my one good friend on a mountain

peak, with fifty miles of wilderness between us and the next human being, God was in his heaven and all was right with the world.

I have formed greatly rewarding relationships with other people. I have made contact with some of the great minds of the world through books, always my solace, and I have noticed that the world has grown less personal and direct in its cruelty. (We no longer burn witches and torture heretics; or at least we do not do it without much subtlety.) I have even for periods achieved a paradoxical optimism.

My five years of marriage have been a most rewarding, maturing and creative experience. As will be shown in the next chapter, I consider maturity one of the most important criteria for true creativeness.

CHAPTER II

CONCEPTS AND INFLUENCES

As before stated, sex plays an important role in the creative process. It is creativity itself. As a matter of fact, when I was first married, and had no longer to do, as the young lady in Lysistrata says, with "makeshifts," I was so preoccupied with procreativity that I would have been quite content to ignore creativeness in other areas had I not been involved in a school program which required it. But Margaret Mead has developed a theory, in her studies of primitive peoples, which helps to explain why the satisfactions of procreativity, for me, could not continue indefinitely to replace the need for artistic expression.

While Sigmund Freud came to believe that, because of a psychological difficulty which he discovered and called "penis envy," almost no woman could become truly well-adjusted, Margaret Mead, though she recognized the importance of this phenomenon, particularly at certain stages in a child's life, eventually came to quite the opposite conclusion as to the really well-adjusted sex. She found that the female child learns to be, whereas the male child must learn to become and to act.[1]

> If women are to be restless and questing, even in the face of child-bearing, they must be made so through education. If men are ever to be at peace, they must have, in addition to paternity, culturally elaborated forms of expression that are

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[1] Margaret Mead, Male and Female, (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1949), 477pp.

> lasting and sure. Each culture - in its own way - has developed forms that will make men satisfied in their constructive activities without distorting their sure sense of their masculinity. Fewer cultures have yet found ways in which to give women a divine discontent that will demand other satisfactions than those of child-bearing.[2]
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> So the life of the female starts and ends with sureness, first with the simple identification with her mother, last with the sureness that that identification is true, and that she has made another human being. The period of doubt, of envy of her brother, is brief and comes early, followed by the long years of sureness.[3]

The male can never know with the same absolute certainty of the female that he has, to use the conceit of the first chapter, become God and created a child. The male child ". . . carries his knowledge of child-birth as something that women can do, that his sister will be able to do, as a latent goad to some other type of achievement."[4]

These quotations present the conclusions baldly. By more extensive quoting and a more involved commentary I could point up the theory more clearly, but all this and the observations on which the conclusions are based can be found in Dr. Mead's book Male and Female, and as stated at the outset this is to be an introspective rather than a scholarly paper.

But does not the possibility of the validity of this theory throw light not only on the drive to be creative, but also on the rarity of the female genius in the fine arts? Men can never achieve that most sure and concrete assurance of their creativity by simply accepting their rôle in the nature of things. They must strive and struggle elaborately to construct a rôle of creativity for themselves.

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[2] Ibid., p. 160.
[3] Ibid., p. 158.
[4] Ibid., p. 157.

In some primitive societies the ceremonial activities of men, their art expressions and initiation rites, have involved a frank, though complicated and stylized imitation of the functions of women.

In our own society many of these "culturally elaborated forms of expression" are pursuits toward the end of making money. Still other pursuits, not directly so oriented, necessitate the following of a long and devious program before any achievement can be realized. This condition of the society must leave a great many men dissatisfied most of the time, and we see evidences that it does. Anyway, the painter has found, either through initial certainty or through search and experimentation, that he can find satisfaction in his constructive activities through few, if any, of these forms except creative art. And although the creative artist must also follow the long, hard road, with periods of discouragement all his life, there are always being produced concrete evidences of his progress from which he can derive great satisfaction as well as pain. For pain and satisfaction are both present in that time of his great absorption in the conception, the labor, and the birth of the created object.

There are other interesting ideas about the role of sex in the creative process. Sigmund Freud's theory of sublimation is one which, still taking the autobiographical approach, I feel to have great importance. At an age no later than five I became aware of the tremendous importance of sex. I also quickly learned, from the attitudes of adults who discovered evidences of this awareness, that there was little that was really satisfying I could do about sex until very much later, and that this drive had to be channeled into less basic areas of expression. In this society it is hardly possible that the libido

ever be wholly satisfied.

Pure sex also plays an extensive rôle in the content of abstract art. This is certainly not always apparent, at least not consciously apparent, even to an intelligent observer trained in other fields. The anthropologist Melville Herskovits has this to say in describing a decorated African tray:

> When first seen by one who is not familiar with the conventions of this art, the tray suggests nothing. The design is notable not alone for the beauty of the motifs, but for the mastery with which the circular space is utilized. To ascribe the meaning given by the Bush-Negroes to the total composition, however, or to any of the elements in it, defies the most agile imagination.
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> Yet any Bush-Negro can independently interprete this carving in realistic terms. The two large figures on either side of the central line are women. The outer units of these figures are their arms, the inner corresponding elements are their legs. Of the rest of the body, only the vulva is represented, while the small triangular figure represents the male principle, the sexual organ . . . The two small figures represent the twins it is hoped will be born to these women . . . Here is an instance of how purely arbitrary conventionalization can be.[5]

It is my opinion that the conventionalizations were not nearly so arbitrary as Herskovits suspected. An abstract artist would not need the native to tell him of the sex content of the tray, for the shapes are basic in their sex content and are similar to those which many artists have learned, more or less independently, to use. One of these very shapes can be seen in my woodcut No. 2.

Further use of sex as subject matter will be presented in the section on Paintings.

The next concept to be introduced is one which should strongly influence any painter who is interested in honesty and growth. That

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[5] Melville J Herskovits, Man and His Works. (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1949). P. 383.

is the necessity for the mind to remain flexible, liberal, honest, unprejudiced, and free; that one be, in fact, so willing to accept and examine new ideas and concepts of knowledge and maturity that he is willing, if necessary, to undergo a second and third adolescence as a period in which these new ideas are digested and integrated into his personality. Again I should like to quote from Margaret Mead:

> One of the particular characteristics of a changing society is the possibility of deferred maturity, of later and later shifts in the lives of the most complex, the most flexible individuals. In very simple societies children have completed their acceptance of themselves and their roles in life by the time they are six or seven, and then must simply wait for physical maturity to assume a complete role. But in most societies, adolescence is a period of re-examination, and possible re-orientation of the self towards the expressed goals of society. In cultures like ours, there may be a second or a third adolescence, and the most complex, the most sensitive, may die still questing, still capable of change, starting like Franz Boas at seventy-seven to re-read the folklore of the world in the light of new theoretical developments. No one who values civilization and realizes how men have woven the fabric of their lives from their own imaginations as they played over the memory of the past, the experience of the present, and the hope of the future, can count this postponed maturity, this possibility of recurrent adolescent crises and change of life-plan, as anything but gain.[6]

Now adolescence is certainly a most uncomfortable condition but it appears inevitable that thoughtful people must again and again plunge themselves into this malleable state when new ideas, new materials, and new concepts appear. We must struggle toward a condition now described by psychologists as maturity.

That we be well-adjusted to the society in which we live is not a criterion of this condition, for every day in every area of living we see evidences that the society is not a mature one.

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[6] Mead, op. cit., p. 361.

Harry Overstreet, in his book The Mature Mind, which does give many of these criteria, says: " . . . given certain cultural conditions, the immature person is likely to effect a smoother 'adjustment' than is the mature person. He is not, however, because he can adjust himself, on that account a more genuinely fulfilled person."[7]

Adolescence is a period in which we strive toward maturity, and for the reason that no man can ever fulfill all the criteria of maturity, we who earnestly seek for it must again and again undergo periods of adolescence. When I finished college I was on a plateau of maturity, but from the time I entered graduate school I have been again in the steep wilderness of adolescence. Just beginning to emerge now, I do not look forward with much pleasure to that inevitable time when I must again plunge into this wilderness. For although we like to be sure, we must not be. There is value, then in the paradoxical philosophy of the dadaists as expressed by Marcel Duchamps (Life: Vol. 32, No. 17, April 28, 1952; article by Winthrop Sargeant) which seems to hold that, of any statement made, the reverse may also be true.

This struggle with our philosophies, this struggle toward maturity in mind and spirit, is to the point, for art is full of evidences, as William Morris says ". . . of each day's hard practice of the difficult art of living."[8]

In the examination of the work of any young painter, the discussion of the influence of other painters cannot legitimately be avoided. Once I heard an abstract painter exhorting a group of students

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[7] Harry Overstreet, The Mature Mind (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1949). P. 74.

[8] Melvin M. Rader, editor, A Modern Book of Esthetics (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1935), p. 430.

to work from nature. I asked, "What if one is given more impetus by looking at the work of other painters?" He replied that he would consider that very dangerous. I can see his point, especially when it is exemplified in a supposedly mature painter such as Max Weber who has in one area of his work been able to be powerful and personal, but in others has been too obviously influenced. Still, it is also true that it is the painters who teach us how to see, and it is pretty generally the case that young painters remain under the influence of others for many years. This is true even for many very great painters, El Greco, for instance.

Having become involved in a program of art study, I have taken various courses in art history which have been valuable in helping me grasp the historical continuity of art. But they have influenced my work only indirectly. It has been the work of art leaders during the last fifty years that has given me material. Certainly this work itself, and here is the indirect influence of earlier art history, has been evolved not only from earlier Western art, but also from the art of Asia and Africa.

My paintings and my desire for creativity have been implemented not only by study of the works of the famous moderns, but also by reading accounts of their lives. And the lives of those tortured artists, like Van Gogh and Gauguin contain really more appeal and inspiration than those of artists who have not had to suffer, or have been heroes almost from the start. Their defeats, like those of John Crowe Ransom's Captain Carpenter, in the poem of that name, are somehow instilled with a quality of the highest victory.

But even the work of the great European Moderns has been less

direct in its influence upon me than that work done in the last five or ten years by American painters. To become familiar with this work I have had largely to depend upon photographs in art magazines.

Most powerful and direct in its effect upon me and my work have been those paintings, by Americans, which I have been able to study at first hand, the work of Leon Smith, Gregory Ivy, John Opper, and of those artists who have visited the school during Art Forums.

I wish that I had been able, by a visit to New York, to see more of this contemporary work, but since I am now approaching that time when I should for a while cut free from these influences, I do not feel it imperative immediately to make that pilgrimage.

The final concept here to be discussed is that of the artist's condition or position in society. The position which he holds, as partly defined by Thomas Mann in his introduction to Masareel's Passionate Journey, is the only one in our society which I feel is native to myself.

> For only the artist is classless, declassed from birth. If he is born a worker, his intellect and noblesse bring him close to the middle class. If, as almost all artists today, he is a product of the middle class, again his intellect, freeing him of social ties, alienates him from his class, makes him suspicious of middle-class interests, and carries him much closer in spirit to the worker, even though he is likewise mistrustful of the latter's class interests. His classlessness is not utopian; it is a natural result of fate and genuine at all time. It is this that surrounds him with an aura of purity, strangeness, detachment, something which in former times would have been called "saintliness;" and it is this too which, in a world shattered and torn asunder by implacable class conflicts, makes him, the outsider, the uninvolved, the pure guest, the only one secretly enjoying the confidence of humanity, despite all the suspicion the "practical" man inevitably feels toward the intellectual and imaginative man.[9]

Mann is speaking here of the hero in Passionate Journey, who he feels must be an artist because of the "air" with which he goes about

the world and carries on his activities. This condition of uninvolvement, Mann recognizes, is a paradox in the nature of the artist, who in many ways is most terribly involved with the world. But a certain intellectual objectivity restrains him from completely identifying himself with any one particular segment of the society.

In connection with Franz Masareel's powerful and moving novel in woodcut, it is interesting to note that the quotations which he uses as epigraphs for his work could equally well be used for any masterpiece by a creative artist. The first, from Walt Whitman, reads, "Behold! I do not give lectures, or a little charity: When I give, I give myself." The second, translated from Romain Roland's French, says " . . . pleasures and pain, pranks and jests, experiences and follies, straw and hay, figs and grapes, green fruit and ripe fruit, roses and skyscrapers, things I have seen, read, known, had and lived."

The truly great artist has no particular cause for which to fight, no particular point to prove, but he reveals himself with candor and confidence. And that self which the truly great artist has become is likely to be a reflection of what is most basically typical and genuinely human in his society.

When an artist's mode of expression, through years of practice, has become thoroughly natural to him, and when he has gained, through repeated trials by fire, mature and penetrating insights into the nature of man and the universe, his work may then become meaningful and powerful. That is the goal toward which I have started and toward which I shall continue to work.

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[9] Thomas Mann, Introduction to Franz Manareel's Passionate Journey (New York: Lear Publishers, Inc., 1948), p. 21.

PAINTINGS

The books I have read, the literature I have loved, have given me food for elaborate daydreams which are too personal, too shifting, perhaps too satisfying in their own right to do anything with, to be molded into art form. In abstract painting I have been able to achieve the necessary reticence and action. In order to paint one must make a decision and then act. One must thus come to grips with life. If the decision, the act, and the result are wrong, one may make another decision and another action. But it is necessary to act. And since painting is essentially action, the discussion of some of my paintings will be description of the actual processes which have produced them. On the other hand, sometimes one cannot remember for long just how the painting was done.

The beginning student's work is largely depersonalized by the student's concentration on the necessity to learn the elements of design and to discover technique. Only when the necessary knowledge becomes second nature can one's work become truly warm and personal. My work has come only part way toward the goal. Sometimes when I have been completely free and spontaneous, I have been pretty successful. At other times when I have simply tried to paint as well as I could, I have been pretty successful. Usually my work has combined these two paradoxical approaches.

I shall first discuss the painting I feel least attached to, that is, "Landscape." When I saw a photograph of a recent painting by Adolph Gottlieb, I felt that the material and the conception were quite

native to me and I simply wanted to do something like it, but I did not attach very much importance to the exercise or the result. A year ago I had done a painting which I also called "Landscape," and the second painting, though its basic composition was from Gottlieb, is an extension and a modification of the same idea. The lower part of the painting speaks of earthiness - of the aliveness and activity in the loose worm-filled earth. Some of the forms escape through the broken surface. Variations of the forms in the upper part were also present in the earlier painting. They have a mystic connotation which I cannot explain, but I suppose they have something to do with flying saucers and the forces of the heavens.

The second painting of this group to be completed was the Pendulum. Its style was derived to a large degree from that of the veteran French painter Herbin whose style in turn was derived apparently from the De Stijl group. I used a similar style for a time three or four years ago and I wished to return briefly to the peculiar pleasures of the unbroken line and the neat surface. The type of surface I desired seemed to demand enamel colors and it was with this painting forming in my mind that I bought my first.

This is a most fascinating and demanding way of painting. For more than two weeks I was able to think of nothing but the problems presented by it. It robbed me of sleep. My first drawing was not very far different from the final result but that design was still changed and color sketched about ten times before I started painting and some five or six times afterward. I have included in the exhibit a sketch showing some of the most important evolutions superimposed over the original. Each element in a painting of this type assumes such

importance that if one changes the dimensions of any element by a fraction of an inch, it affects the whole painting. If one experimentally change an element by placing an appropriately colored paper over it, one must look not only at the changed spot, but at various areas at various distances from the change, so that he may determine the effect of the change. This had to be done over and over in this painting and some of the decisions were indeed difficult.

For me this style and this type of surface can be described as sweet. And it can get dangerously close to saccharin.

The obvious subject matter, that of the pendulum, is fairly simple. All the elements are designed to implement the feeling of "reciprocal" motion. But there is something mystic and potentially symbolic in the motion of the pendulum and the content of the painting is quite complex. Early in the semester I began to compile a list of completed and projected paintings and before I knew it, I found that I had written the following:

I. a. Pendulum

b. Painting illustrating the use of a simple mechanical device in a complex sex act allowing both male and female to gratify bisexual drives.

Now I believe the fact that I spontaneously grouped the Pendulum and this projected painting together forms some sort of a commentary on the content of the painting. Also is not the fact that such thoughts occur to heterosexual and fairly unrepressed people a commentary on the relativity of sex, a thing that people are prone to consider absolute?

The painting titled "Mother and Child" was done during a time when I was working on another painting showing a very different aspect

of mother-and-childness. I was never able to finish this other painting in which I was working toward an expression of the feelings of sweetness and tenderness. The painting was becoming extremely complicated. In contrast, the painting exhibited is a rather simple statement expressing, for the most part, a harsher aspect of mother-child relationships.

A painting to which I refuse to give a title other than the purely arbitrary one of "Composition Number Three" was evolved over a long period of time. First I covered the whole panel with small areas of strong color; that was the first stage. Later, I circumscribed these areas of color with thin black lines. Next I superimposed a structure of wide dark blue lines over the entire panel. At this stage the effect was of a stained glass window. After several weeks this superimposed structure was strengthened and changed with black, and finally the white was brushed in.

It so happened that most of this work was done in a relatively unworried and casual manner and the painting grew to be an extremely personal one; but personal in specifically what regard, it is hard to say. Certainly there are elements of sex in it; there are reflections of the African sculpture with which I have become so intrigued; there are elements of religion, of architecture, and of natural history. There are elements, which can less readily be demonstrated, of questing, and freedom and longing for freedom. Indeed the painting has somehow captured a pretty comprehensive reflection of my personality as it can be expressed in painting.

Both "Blue Form" and "Black Forms" were done on top of older and very different painting. And yet it is interesting to note that when

one works over an old painting, the new one, although completely different in composition, often retains some of the quality of the old painting underneath. Both of these old paintings were raw expressions of sexuality. The composition over which "Black Forms" is painted, was comprised of three large elongated elipses. The painting underneath "Blue Form" had grown to be actually an obscenity. In both these paintings now the sexual elements have been muted, diffused, complicated, and made more aesthetically tolerable; but sex is still overwhelmingly the most important single aspect in their content.

The method employed in these paintings combines a certain amount of spontaneity in the setting down of the basic forms, with careful, thoughtful workmanship over all the surface.

I could interprete the various elements and the whole composition of "Black Forms" almost with the same precise realism as did the formerly mentioned Bush-Negro in explaining the carved tray, but I do not feel it is my duty to do so, or that it is necessary. It is enough to say that the painting depicts not only organic parts, but an action.

I have a way of working that I occasionally use and I call it "hopefully destroying a painting." Sometimes when I have worked long and carefully on a painting, and have had no success, I dive in with completely spontaneous brush work over the entire surface; sometimes it works! "Little Number Four" was done in this manner. I think it is a pretty good painting but, as is the case with them all, its statement is not made with words and I have not yet learned its content well enough to discuss it. Women, particularly, seem to like it.

In order to paint, one must make a start and often the initial action is taken with no other idea than to make this start. In "Composition Number Five," I put down the colors and then almost simultaneously brushed on the black and white, all as a process of beginning. Later I became aware that this beginning had reached the stage of completed expression, and so I stopped.

The next painting to be discussed, "Composition Number Eight," presented me with many severe problems. In it I hoped to work toward the richness and depth of George McNeil. I hoped that the heavy texture which I applied to the panel would help me avoid an appearance of thinness without using so much paint. I sketched on to the panel a composition strongly influenced by McNeil, and then the trouble started! I had wanted to work with enamels and a pallet knife, somewhat in the manner of the painting exhibited called "Wall." First I found that the texture drank up quantities of paint, and the surface still looked thin. Then I found that I could not use a pallet knife at all on this texture. After several days of this, the painting looked pretty hopeless but I was already so emotionally tied up with it that I was beginning to lead a "life of quiet desperation." About a week later, with a desperation suddenly much less quiet, I attacked the painting with resolution and began a tremendous struggle with it. I felt that I was actually physically wrestling. I applied colors, threw the painting to the floor, poured on solvent and scrubbed, then I applied more colors, poured on more solvent, and scrubbed again. Finally, in a last supreme effort, I changed the whole surface with black and white, and put the painting aside finished. And yet I gazed at it in puzzlement for long periods of time during the following

weeks. Some time after the completion of this painting, I enjoyed a deep aesthetic experience with a work of genius in another art field, that was the Charlie Chaplin movie, Limelight. Immediately after the movie, I felt a strong desire to see this painting, "Comp. No. 8." In this receptive mood I was able to grasp much more of the value and content of the painting and for the first time I felt certain that the expression was a complete one. Perhaps I transferred some of the value of the movie to the painting. Still there are in it evidences of both quiet and violent desperation; and nothing of McNeil! It is impossible for me to determine the quality of the product of so difficult and intimate a birth.

I did begin to realize, however, that when I learned to do with color what I could do with black and white, I should be getting somewhere. Since a highly developed color sense is something which, for most people, can be achieved only through long practice, I felt this would be a development of two or three years hence. But shortly after, without really thinking about it, I began to try to do just this, that is to work in color, in my "Comp. No. 11," as I had with black and white.

"Figure" was initially planned as a joke, as a sort of satire on Franz Klein, but the entirely spontaneous brushwork necessitated that it immediately become quite personal. Actually it appears to be drawn more from Klee than from Klein. I was forced to realize that this was not a joke, but a valid personal expression.

A discussion of the content of any of these paintings could be carried to great lengths, and although the language of painting is visual, a certain amount of penetrating verbal analysis can be of

great value. But words cannot replace a picture nor express all its qualities.

CONCLUSION

I am writing this thesis as an art student, not an artist. I am an artist in that I am caught: I shall never stop painting; it has become part of my life. My status as a student, however, is much more forcibly borne in upon me, and by a variety of facts, the most obvious of them being that I have less experience, a shorter career as an art student, then many of the candidates for this degree. Also I feel, although I have been painting for almost four years, that I am "just beginning to paint." I have been a person of many and varied interests and it has been only during the last year and a half that I have enjoyed a comparative singleness of purpose.

This degree, Master of Fine Arts, implies that the candidate has acquired a degree of competence. Other factors, it seems to me, imply the recognition that this degree of competence is still on a student level. For one thing, the number of paintings customarily submitted is from twelve to twenty. Now many professional painters produce fewer than that number in a year, so the fact that the candidate is asked to work perhaps five times as fast as the professional, implies that the work must be considered, at least in part, experimental. Also the fact that most painters now hit their stride some eight or ten years after leaving school in itself implies that the candidate's work will not be mature.

The foregoing is intended not as an apology but as a reflection on my attitude toward my work so far.

This paper runs counter to my paintings in that it is a revelation

much more bold and harsh. A creative artist's work should evidence a certain reticence as well as expressiveness. I only hope that my paintings, and this paper too, reflect a potential for continued growth.

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